



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – United Nations Development Fund For Women

**Remarks of Ambassador Jeffery L. Bleich
at the United Nations Development Fund For Women,
Australian National Committee's Annual General Meeting
Canberra Museum and Gallery**

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Thank you for the kind introduction and for inviting me to be a part of this distinguished panel of speakers tonight.

Tonight, I'd like to speak to you not only as an Ambassador, but also as a son, a father, a husband. Too often when we talk about foreign policy we divorce what is happening in our world from what happens in our homes. But what happens in a person's home never stays just in that home. It spills out into our communities and across our world, whether it is good or bad. Children who grow up in an environment of fear and hate carry that fear and hate with them.

When I served as the director of President Clinton's White House Commission on Youth Violence, we studied what causes people to be violent. The single greatest predictor of future violence is a child's exposure to violence in their home or community. It is a cycle. Think about children growing up in a violent home, where their mother is abused. Every single day they are scared. They are scared that their mother will be beaten, that she could die. They are scared that they will say something that triggers their father's rage or exposes what is happening to them all. They are scared that they will be beaten themselves. They are scared each time their father comes home; but they are just as scared that their father will never come home and they'll be left with no place to live and nothing to eat.

They wake up every morning with a sick feeling in their stomachs; they cannot concentrate in school, and they are anxious every moment they are in their own home. They hate their father for beating their mother. They hate their mother for not being able to stop it. They hate themselves for not stopping it. They are just consumed with guilt and fear and hate. And do we wonder why a child raised this way is more likely to express hate, and fear, and violence against others? And that is how this cycle continues.

There are few things in the world as corrosive to the human spirit or to a society as this kind of cruel violence.



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As an Ambassador, I look each day at some of the greatest threats facing our world – violent terrorism, extreme poverty, the spread of HIV/AIDS – and in each case violence against women is a cause. It is insidious. One in three women in this world experience gender-based violence in their lifetimes. Those are mothers who cannot care for themselves or their families, who miss work, who are physically injured, who are raped and infected with disease, and who have no recourse or hope. Their children are lost and full of rage. Their husbands are so full of self-hate they inflict it on the only people in the world who love them. Their societies are the darkened and damaged by all of this. This is the breeding ground of violence, poverty, and disease.

So this is not a problem just for the victim. This is not a problem just for the family. This is not a problem just in their country. It is a staggering global problem. It is a problem for each and every one of us.

Earlier this year, along with UNIFEM Ambassador Nicole Kidman, I helped break ground for a center to address this issue on a global scale. This is the Family Violence Prevention Fund's new international center at the Presidio National Park in San Francisco, which was funded in part by the U.S. Congress. We are building it, because our leaders and our Congress recognize that family violence is largely entrenched in culture and society, and we need to bring together experts to help expose it and dislodge it. We need a place to evaluate and identify strategies that prevent violence against women and children, and to train and empower people in the field.

We also need to change public attitudes about family violence. This is not a woman's issue. It is not a private matter. It is an issue that impacts men and women alike. Solutions must include action by men as well as women – as the White Ribbon campaign here does.

About six years ago, I, along with Vice President Joe Biden, got involved with the Family Violence Prevention Fund to help establish a similar campaign in the United States: the Founding Fathers campaign. The goal of Founding Fathers is to break the cycle of violence by training boys and men to learn respect and non-violence through their fathers, coaches, teachers, mentors, and other male role models. Because the vast majority of violence in homes is perpetrated by men, Founding Fathers focuses on training men to understand 4 things:

1. We have to take responsibility to stop domestic violence in your home and community
2. We need to learn ways to address conflict with respect and without violence
3. We need to coach the next generation of boys into becoming responsible men;



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4. And we all need to create an environment where men realize that domestic violence won't be tolerated – that they will lose the respect of their peers and pay a high price in their lives.

Here in the Asia-Pacific region, the situation in Papua New Guinea reminds us every day of how much work needs to be done to change male attitudes. Two-thirds of women in PNG experience domestic violence in their lifetimes. More than half are subjected to forced sex. And, when victims have the courage to report these crimes to authorities, they may find themselves assaulted by police as well, and violated again by an ineffective legal system. The devaluation of women is rampant in PNG at every level – women have worse access to health care, they are less educated, they have limited access to credit, and they have no recourse because they have virtually no voice in PNG's economic and political activities. As Secretary Clinton said two days ago in Port Moresby, PNG needs fundamental reforms that will protect the rights of women to live freely and safely in that society. Those cannot begin to take root unless there is also a change in men's attitudes towards women.

In the U.S. we now have an Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, Melanne Verveer. As she told the U.S. House of Representatives, in this Administration, the issue of violence against women is a priority in foreign policy; it is not "relegated to the margins." It is one of the largest and most entrenched humanitarian, development, and security issues we face, and it must be treated this way.

I am very honored to report tonight, that over the next couple of days, while Secretary Clinton is with me in Australia, she will announce several initiatives that we are undertaking together with Australia and UNIFEM's umbrella, UN Women, to combat gender-based violence. But I'll let her announce those tomorrow.

The United States will also be working bilaterally with other nations, and multilaterally, as well as with NGOs to prevent and stop gender-based violence. We're working with faith communities and religious leaders to incorporate these messages into their work. And in schools around the world, we are working to ensure that boys and girls have safe and equal access to high-quality education that teaches them the intrinsic worth of each person.

This is hard, important work. It requires more than just better messages; it requires reforming education and health care, changing policies and customs that marginalize women, and educating the next generation about the need to value and respect all people, regardless of gender, race, or other factors.

But this work must be done. Until we stop violence against women, women can never achieve their full potential as equal stakeholders in this world. As Secretary Clinton has



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said, you cannot have vibrant civil societies if half the population is left behind. Women's participation is essential for good governance, the rule of law, and economic prosperity – and gender-based violence today is a barrier to each and every one of those.

So tonight, I applaud the work of UNIFEM Australia. Here in your communities and in projects throughout Asia Pacific you are leading critical work. I look forward to working with you in the months and years ahead to help us empower women, respond to the victims of violence against women, and ultimately build a world where every man and every woman is valued and respected.